

# In battle of digital assistants, Google heads to Apple turf

AFP, Mountain View, United States

Google announced Wednesday it was bringing its digital assistant to Apple iPhones as part of its effort to win the battle with tech rivals on artificial intelligence.

At its annual developers conference at an outdoor concert-venue near its main campus in Mountain View, California, Google unveiled its vision for computing centered around artificial intelligence.

"We are now witnessing a new shift in computing: the move from a mobile-first to an AI-first world," Google chief executive Sundar Pichai said during an opening presentation.

"It is forcing us to reimagine our products for a world that allows a more natural, seamless way of interacting with technology."

Those interactions, for Google, include using artificial intelligence to let people engage computers conversationally, have software anticipate needs, and let smartphone cameras "recognize" what they see.

"In an AI-first world, we are rethinking all of our products and applying machine learning to solve

problems," Pichai said.

Google Assistant, the center of its AI efforts, is in a fierce battle with rivals such as Amazon's Alexa, Microsoft Cortana and Apple's Siri to be the top choice for use in smartphones as well as connected homes, cars and a range of other devices. "Siri's got company, and all these other guys are pretty serious about it," said Gartner analyst Brian Blau.

Artificial intelligence is being woven into Google's free Gmail service, used by more than a billion people, for features such as suggesting responses to messages. For example, opening an email containing an invitation to dinner might trigger a prompt to reply "I'm in."

Google machine vision capabilities are being used to enable services such as recognizing who is in pictures and what they are doing as well as translate languages in signs viewed through smartphone cameras, demonstrations showed.

Advanced "Lens" features are being added first to the Google Photo application, which is available free.

Aiming a smartphone camera at a flower will prompt it to be identified; while aiming it at a complex

password and hotspot name on a router will let it automatically log into the wireless connection.

Google also unveiled a second-generation computer chip it designed specifically to improve cloud computing capabilities in data centers. "We want Google Cloud to be the best cloud for machine learning," Pichai said.

He described the internet giant's core search service and its Google Assistant as the company's most important AI products.

Google Assistant, introduced last year, is now on more than 100 million devices, according to the team's vice president of engineering, Scott Huffman.

"We are really starting to crack the hard computer challenge of conversationality," Huffman said.

"Soon, with Google Lens, your assistant will be able to have a conversation about what you see."

Google used the conference to announce a software kit that will let developers build Assistant capabilities into robots, applications, and other computerized creations.

Google also announced enhancements to its Home personal assistant, adding abilities

such as hands free telephone calls and acting as speakers for wireless audio. Developers cheered when talk turned to Google-backed mobile operating system Android.

Google announced that more than two billion devices powered by Android software are used monthly in a freshly passed milestone.

The coming version of Android, referred to simply as "O" for the time being, will also have boosted artificial intelligence features along with enhanced security, executives showed.

Google is also crafting a lighter version of Android, referred to as "Go," designed for maximum performance on low-cost, entry-level smartphones in developing countries where internet bandwidth is lean or expensive.

Google said that while it is happy with the momentum of its Daydream virtual reality platform based on using smartphone as screens in headsets, it is working with partners on stand-alone virtual reality gear.

Partners in the endeavor include Vive-maker HTC and Lenovo, according to Google virtual reality team vice president Clay Bavor.



Mohsin Habib Chowdhury, senior general manager for marketing and sales at Berger Paints Bangladesh, attends a press meet to announce the commencement of eighth Berger Award for Excellence in Architecture, at Agargaon in Dhaka on Wednesday.

## Supermarket chains move to e-commerce

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Agora has a huge customer base and it wants to ensure a seamless service channel before entering a virtual domain, he added.

The brand already has a website that takes corporate orders but not retail orders. "We are working on different e-commerce models. We want to present the most convenient one," Saleh added.

Chaldal.com, the pioneer in grocery delivery service in Bangladesh, began its operations in 2013. It does not have a physical store.

The market leader receives about 1,000 orders a day, which yields about Tk 12 to Tk 13 lakh on average, said Zia Ashraf, its chief

operating officer.

The e-commerce site currently delivers to addresses in Dhaka city but it has plans to expand to Chittagong and Sylhet soon, he added. Pran-RFL too is after a slice of the pie.

The group launched its e-commerce site othoba.com last year, where it also sells grocery items.

"We receive huge grocery orders everyday," said Kamruzzaman Kamal, director marketing at Pran-RFL.

Othoba.com monthly sales come to about Tk 50 lakh a month, he added.

There are more than 2,000 e-commerce platforms in Bangladesh, of whom, only a handful are selling groceries.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receives a cheque for Tk 4 crore from Jamuna Bank Chairman Ismail Hossain Siraji and Jamuna Bank Foundation Chairman Nur Mohammed as donation to the Prime Minister's Education Assistance Trust, Jatir Janak Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Trust and Shuchona Foundation, at a programme at Gono Bhaban in Dhaka on Monday.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receives a cheque for Tk 1 crore from Janata Bank Chairman Shaikh Md Wahid-uz-Zaman as donation to the Prime Minister's relief fund, at a programme at Gono Bhaban in Dhaka on Monday.

## Ignite investments for faster growth

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The global credit rating agency Moody's, in its April 2017 report, expects remittance inflows to stabilise near current levels, and potentially pick up in line with future increases in global oil prices.

"Nevertheless, if the current trend of falling remittance does persist, it would have an adverse credit impact by dampening consumption and widening the current account deficits," it said in the review. In such a situation, government and Bangladesh Bank should take appropriate steps to encourage expatriate workers to send remittance through official channels, the chamber suggests.

The suggestion of the Human Development Report 2016 that Bangladesh should set up a remittance bank for easy and transparent inflow of foreign wage earnings into the country is also worth looking into, according to the chamber.

"Bangladesh's low labour costs and efficient supply chain, especially in the garments industry, are generally believed to be attractive to foreign investors, but yet they are discouraged to make fresh investments in the country because of its underdeveloped infrastructure, and such other impediments, such as the shortage of power and energy, lack of consistency in policy and regulatory framework, scarcity of industrial lands, and political uncertainty."

The government needs to address these impediments to attract more foreign direct investment in the country in order to achieve the target of graduating to a middle-income country by 2021.

During the July-March period of the present fiscal year, the agriculture sector performed well, but continuous government support with inputs and finance will be needed to sustain the sector's growth in the future.

The manufacturing sector also did well, although infrastructure deficits, insufficient availability of competent manpower at managerial levels, high cost of bank loans that discourages both local and foreign investors, and gas and power supply problems were undermining the performance of the sector.

The government will need to adopt suitable measures to remove these bottlenecks in order to support the growth of this all-important sector, the chamber said.

Services sectors also performed well. However, government intervention will be needed to mitigate some sector specific problems in banking, insurance, transportation and communication, tourism, real estate business, and especially, private sector health and education services.

## Form trust fund to achieve SDGs: analysts

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The size of the trust fund should be Tk 1,000 crore instead of Tk 100 crore, he added.

Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of CPD, said the government needs to focus on increasing domestic savings and resources for SDGs achievement as foreign donations will reduce in future amid global economic volatility. The government and private development organisation should work in partnership to make the SDGs a success, he said.

Abul Kalam Azad, chief coordinator for SDGs affairs in the Prime Minister's Office, said the allocation for the trust fund will not be possible in the upcoming budget but the issue will be raised with the prime minister and finance minister.

## Proceeds from tobacco surcharge remain unused

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Meanwhile, the government in fiscal 2014-15 slapped a 1 percent surcharge on the prices of mobile handsets and in March last year, an equal percentage of surcharge on the use of mobile phones.

The government said the proceeds from mobile handsets and their usage will be spent for health and education purposes.

As of April, nearly Tk 240 crore has been collected as surcharge on mobile phones and their usage.

Matiur Rahman, commissioner of Large Taxpayer Unit that collects most of the surcharge from cigarette manufacturers and mobile phone operators, said along with framing policies a panel with representation from both public and private sectors can be formed to ensure the transparent use of surcharges.

## Citi gets new country officer

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"N Rajashekaran brings extensive experience across our client segments to this important role, and post all regulatory approvals, look forward to partnering with him to grow our franchise in Bangladesh."

"The franchise is well-positioned to serve the needs of leading corporate and financial customers and public sector clients under his leadership," Morrow said.

Citi has established a strong presence in Bangladesh since the opening of its first branch in 1987. It now has three branches, two service outlets and more than 150 employees, providing services to institutional clients.

## Rising NPL threatens banking sector: analysts

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The rising NPL is not only rattling the banking sector but also depriving the people of loans at lower rates, they said.

Mehmood Husain, managing director of NRB Bank, urged bankers to be cautious about treasury management. Frequent policy changes by the government also affected the banking industry, he said.

Md Nehal Ahmed, an associate professor of the institute, presented a paper, while Faruq Moinuddin, additional managing director of City Bank, also spoke.

## Grassroot committees to help implement new VAT laws

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The IRD also said the panels will provide directions to hold VAT registration and return submission fairs and take necessary measures to observe the first day of July as the VAT Law Implementation Day.

## GM to stop selling cars in India but not pulling out

REUTERS, Beijing

General Motors Co will stop selling cars in India from the end of this year, drawing a line under two decades of battling in one of the world's most competitive markets where it has less than a one percent share of passenger car sales.

The decision was announced as part of a series of restructuring actions from the Detroit automaker on Thursday, and marks a significant blow to India's strategy of encouraging domestic manufacturing.

GM says it would no longer market its Chevrolet brand - its only brand of cars marketed in

India - despite India's promise as a market set to overtake Japan as the world's third largest in the next decade. But it doesn't plan to leave India entirely.

It plans to keep operating its tech center in Bengaluru and to refocus its India manufacturing operations by making one of its two assembly plants in India - the one at Talegaon, about 100 km (62 miles) southeast of Mumbai - into an export-only factory. It plans to sell the Halol plant in Gujarat to Chinese joint venture partner SAIC Motor Corp.

"We are not giving up benefits India offers as a local cost manufacturing hub with an excellent supplier

base which is extremely competitive," Stefan Jacoby, GM's chief of international operations, said in an interview. GM's exports from India, mainly to Mexico and Latin America, nearly doubled to 70,969 vehicles in the fiscal year than ended on March 31. The Talegaon plant has a capacity of 130,000 vehicles a year.

Jacoby said the move to turn the Talegaon assembly into an export-only plant will not impact GM Korea and its position as an export hub. India will export vehicles mostly to Mexico and South America, among other destinations, while GM Korea will ship Korean-made cars to North America, Southeast Asia, Australia and Pakistan.

## EU calls for urgent release of union leaders

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A tripartite agreement was reached on February 23 between IndustriALL Bangladesh Council, the labour ministry and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, providing for the release of the arrested trade unionists and workers. The cases against them will also be disposed of.

The partners recognised the urgent need to further address acts of discrimination against trade unionists and to effectively investigate and prosecute unfair labour practices in a

timely and transparent manner.

They also suggested simplification of trade union rules for factories housed at export processing zones and urged the government to amend the labour law and EPZ law to allow workers the full freedom of association.

In the joint statement, the partners also urged retailers to adopt responsible business conduct practices and a uniform code of conduct for factory audits in Bangladesh.

Recognising the significant contribution of the Accord, Alliance and

national initiative in enhancing workplace safety, the partners urged the government to commence inspection of factories that have not been reviewed yet by experts.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed said the government has already withdrawn the draft copy of the EPZ law from the parliament for further review.

"We made a lot of progress in workplace safety and labour rights after the Rana Plaza building collapse. I hope the EU will continue our trade privilege," Ahmed added.



A stall attendant describes the projects of Lake City Concord to potential buyers, at the three-day Lake City Concord Apartment Fair 2017, at Khilkhet in Dhaka on May 17.



Md Reaz Uddin, chief operating officer a director of Summit Meghnaghat Power Co Ltd, receives ISO and OHSMS certifications on environment management system, quality management system and occupational health and safety management system, from David Embery, executive director of TUV Austria, at a programme on May 15.